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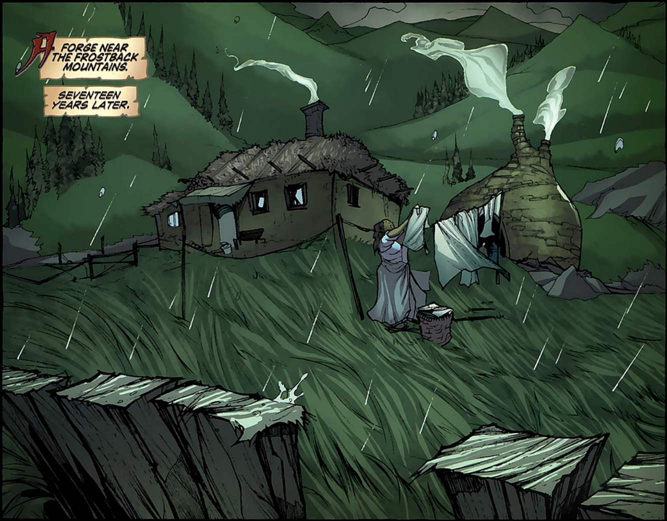
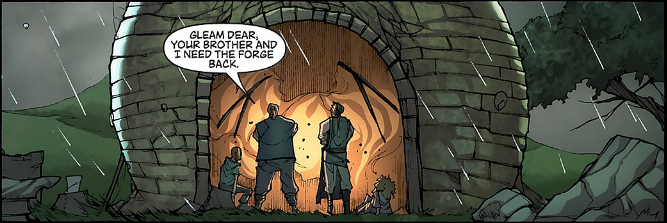
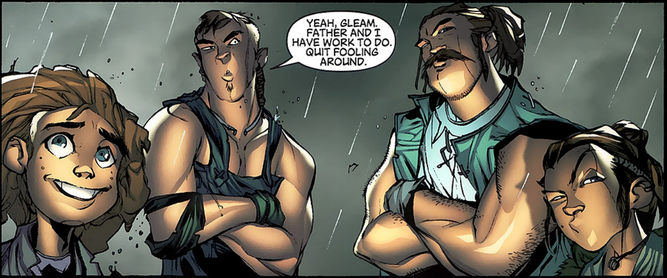

A FORGE NEAR THE FROSTBACK MOUNTAINS.
SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER.


GLEAM DEAR, YOUR BROTHER AND I NEED THE FORGE BACK.


YEAH, GLEAM. FATHER AND I HAVE WORK TO DO. QUIT FOOLING AROUND.

What has come before

Ferelden: a realm lost to time. Home to the Circle of Magi, the region is a major seat of power, and home to the Templars, enforcers of the peace for the realm. A forbidden romance bloomed between the templar named Sadatt and the young mage named Veness, a love that ended with Veness' death and her child. Or so Sadatt believed—but he was mistaken. Veness had hidden their child from her father in the woods with a passing farmer. A child with a special destiny...

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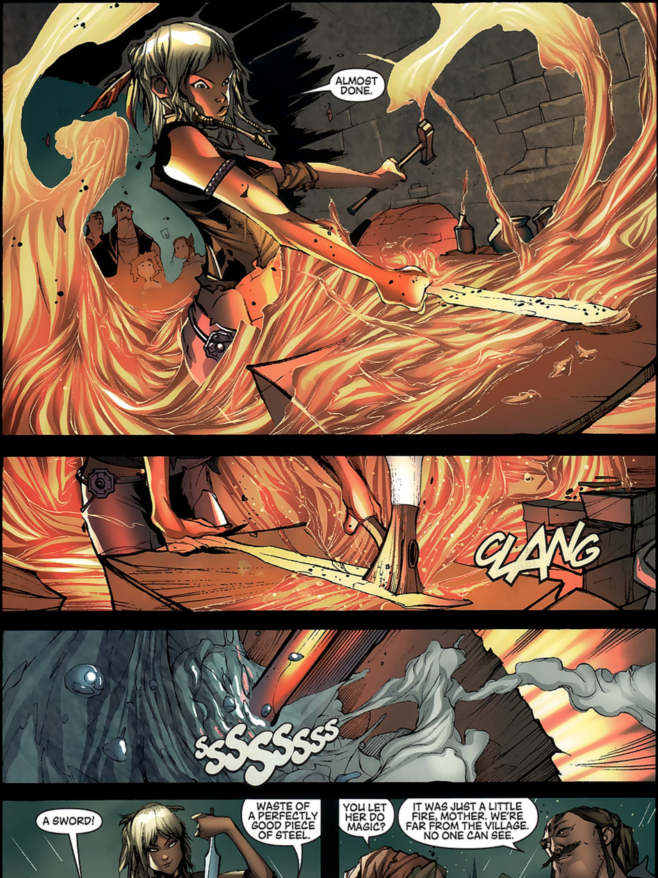
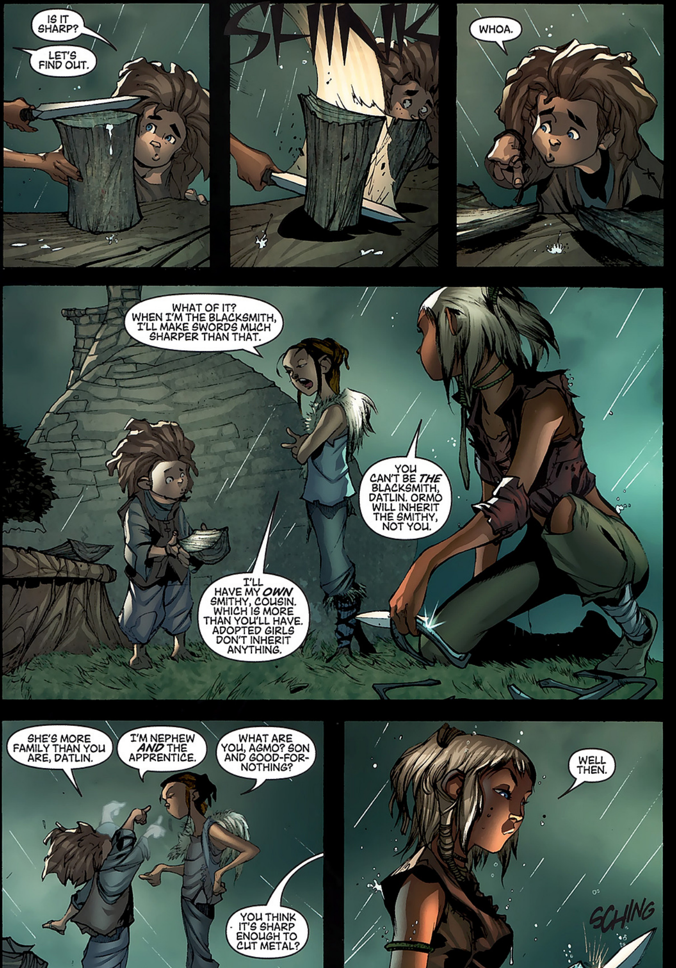
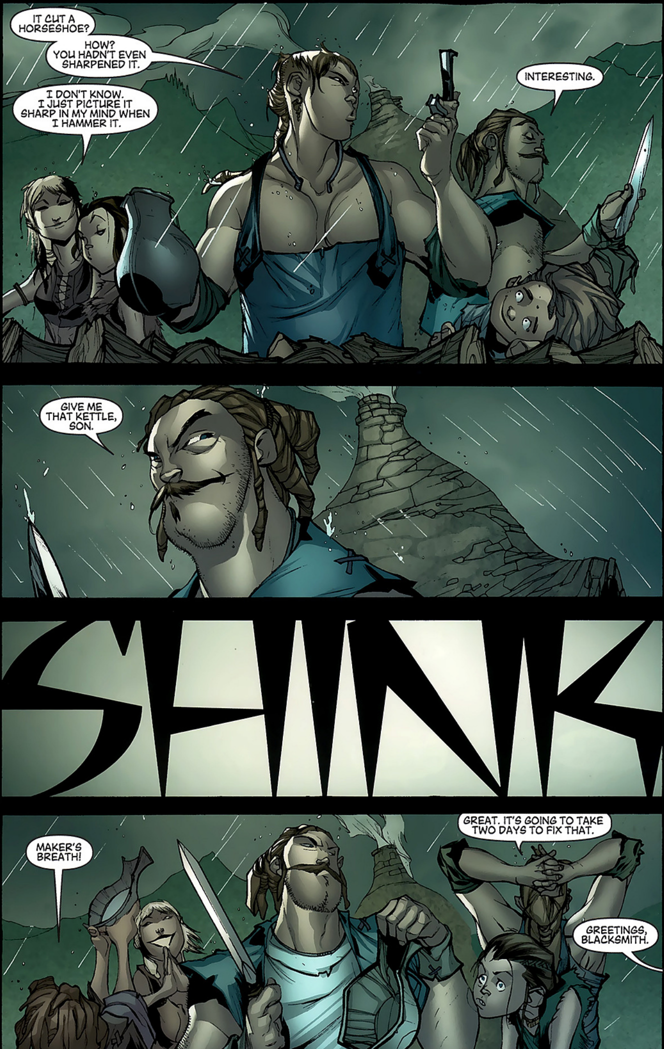
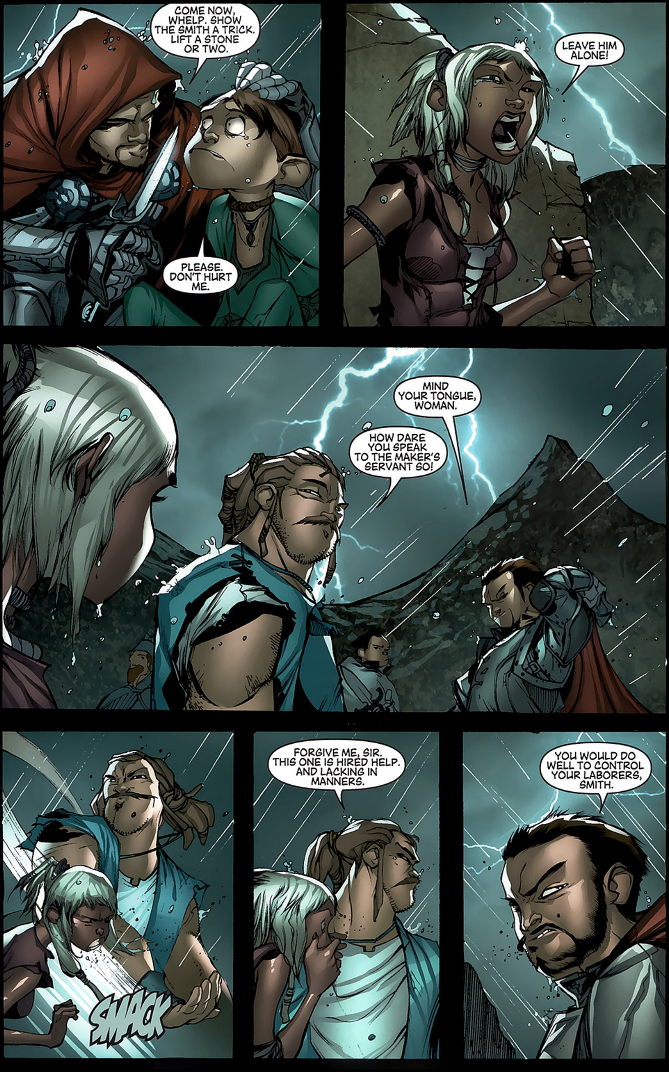
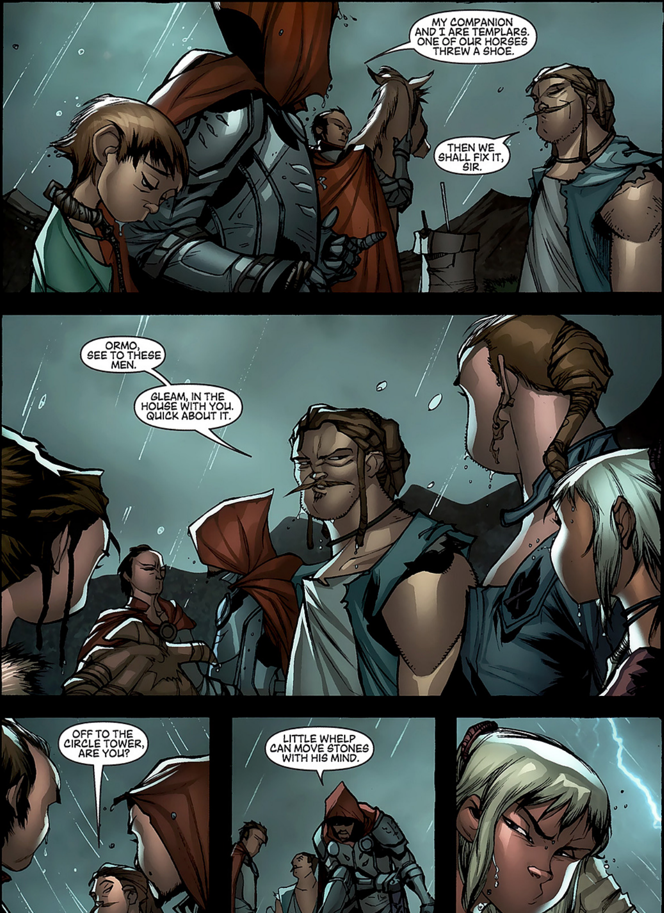
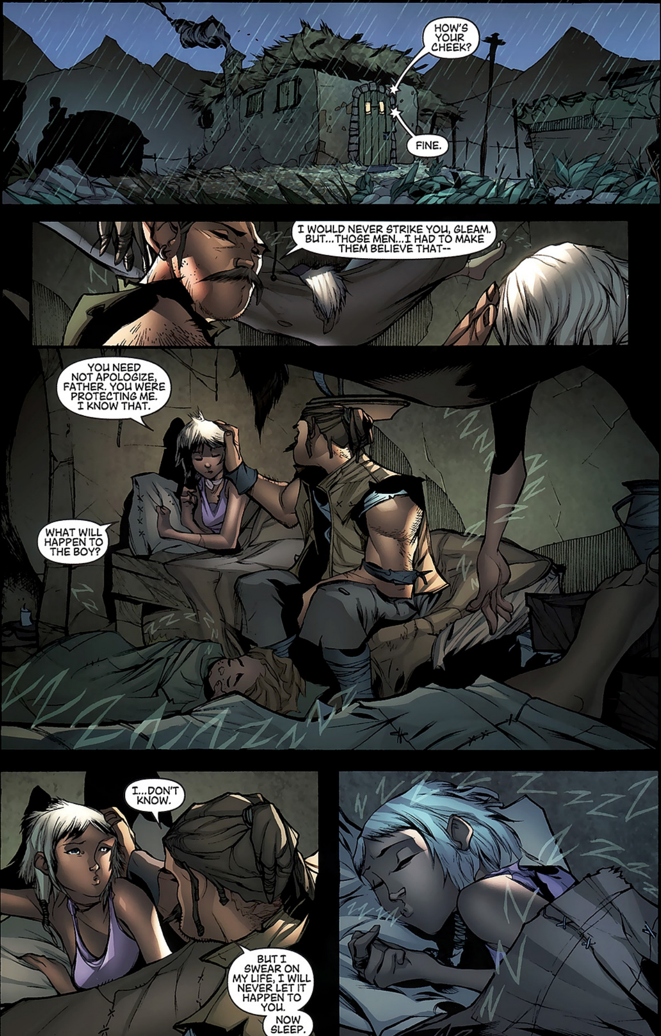

ALMOST DONE.
CLANG
sSSSSSss
A SWORD!
WASTE OF A PERFECTLY GOOD PIECE OF STEEL.
YOU LET HER DO MAGIC?
IT WAS JUST A LITTLE FIRE, MOTHER. WE'RE FAR FROM THE VILLAGE. NO ONE CAN SEE.
IT ONLY TAKES ONE PERSON TO REPORT IT, LOMO.
YOU WANT THE TEMPLARS TO TAKE OUR DAUGHTER FROM US?

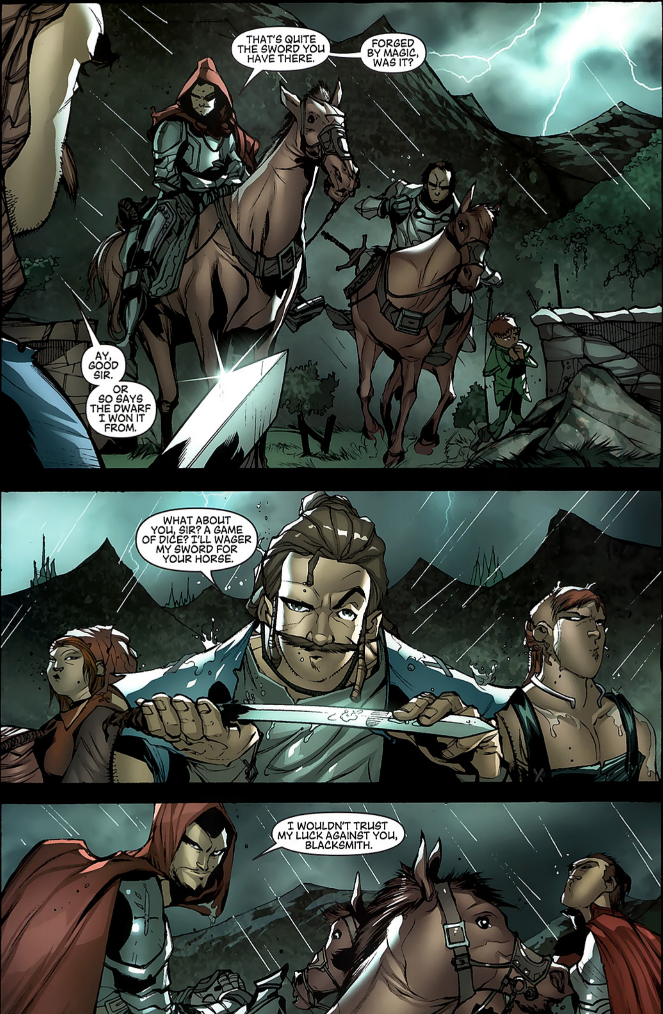

IS IT SHARP?
LET'S FIND OUT.
SCHINK
WHOA.
WHAT OF IT? WHEN I'M THE BLACKSMITH, I'LL MAKE SWORDS MUCH SHARPER THAN THAT.
YOU CAN'T BE *THE* BLACKSMITH, DATLIN. ORMO WILL INHERIT THE SMITHY, NOT YOU.
I'LL HAVE MY *OWN* SMITHY, COUSIN. WHICH IS MORE THAN YOU'LL HAVE. ADOPTED GIRLS DON'T INHERIT ANYTHING.
SHE'S MORE FAMILY THAN YOU ARE, DATLIN.
I'M NEPHEW *AND* THE APPRENTICE.
WHAT ARE YOU, AGMO? SON AND GOOD-FOR-NOTHING?
YOU THINK IT'S SHARP ENOUGH TO CUT METAL?
WELL THEN.
SCHING

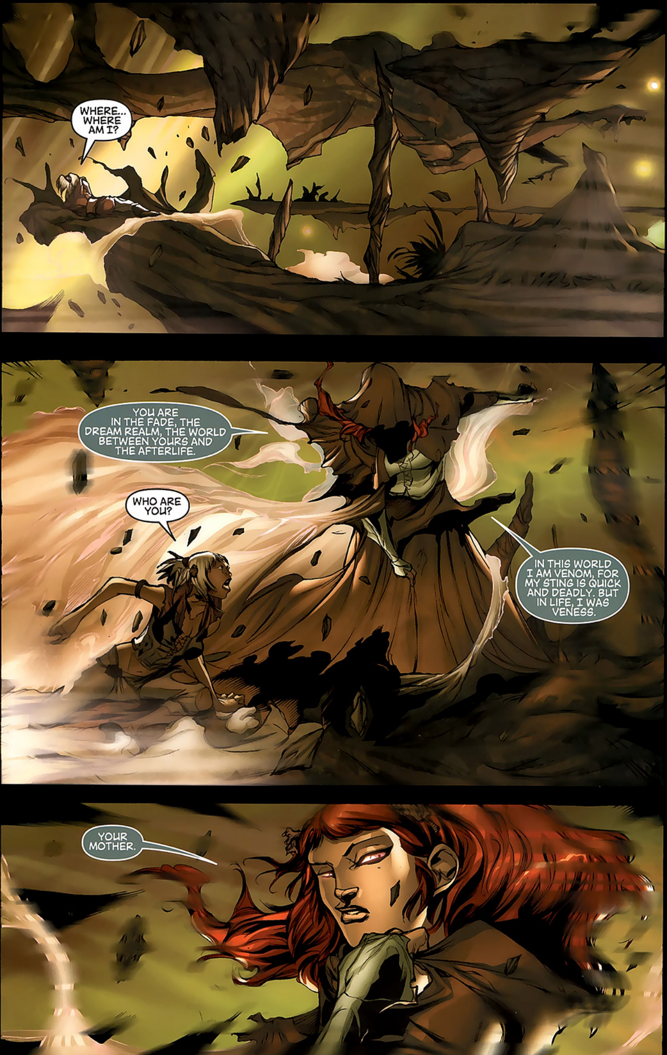

IT CUT A HORSESHOE?
HOW? YOU HADN'T EVEN SHARPENED IT.
I DON'T KNOW. I JUST PICTURE IT SHARP IN MY MIND WHEN I HAMMER IT.
INTERESTING.
GIVE ME THAT KETTLE, SON.
SHINK
MAKER'S BREATH!
GREAT. IT'S GOING TO TAKE TWO DAYS TO FIX THAT.
GREETINGS, BLACKSMITH.

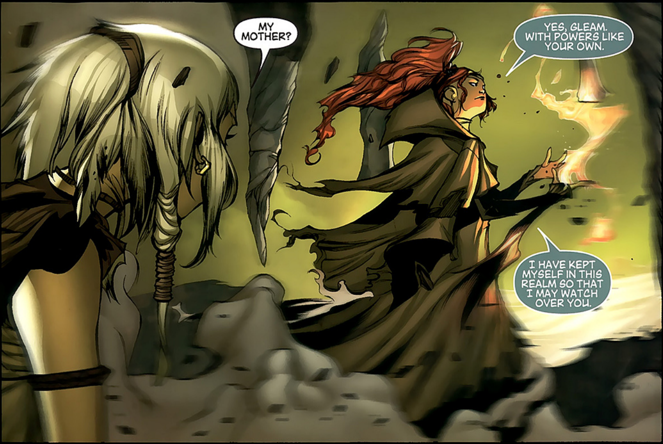

COME NOW, WHELP. SHOW THE SMITH A TRICK. LIFT A STONE OR TWO.
PLEASE. DON'T HURT ME.
LEAVE HIM ALONE!
MIND YOUR TONGUE, WOMAN.
HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO THE MAKER'S SERVANT SO!
SMACK
FORGIVE ME, SIR. THIS ONE IS HIRED HELP. AND LACKING IN MANNERS.
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO CONTROL YOUR LABORERS, SMITH.

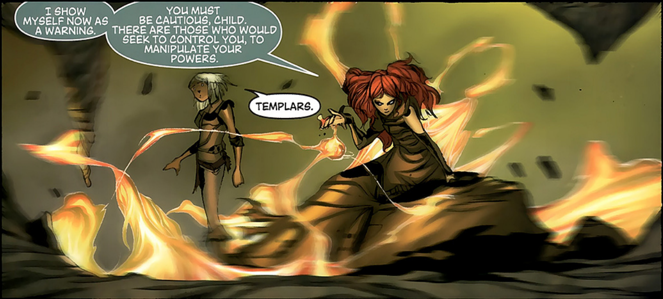

MY COMPANION AND I ARE TEMPLARS. ONE OF OUR HORSES THREW A SHOE.
THEN WE SHALL FIX IT, SIR.
ORMO, SEE TO THESE MEN.
GLEAM, IN THE HOUSE WITH YOU. QUICK ABOUT IT.
OFF TO THE CIRCLE TOWER, ARE YOU?
TAKING BACK THIS MAGE.
LITTLE WHELP CAN MOVE STONES WITH HIS MIND.

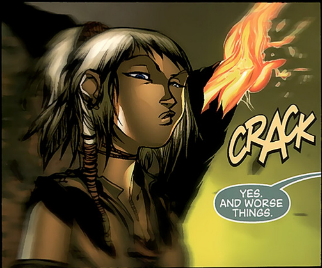

HOW'S YOUR CHEEK?
FINE.
I WOULD NEVER STRIKE YOU, GLEAM. BUT...THOSE MEN...I HAD TO MAKE THEM BELIEVE THAT--
YOU NEED NOT APOLOGIZE, FATHER. YOU WERE PROTECTING ME. I KNOW THAT.
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE BOY?
I...DON'T KNOW.
BUT I SWEAR ON MY LIFE, I WILL NEVER LET IT HAPPEN TO YOU.
NOW SLEEP.

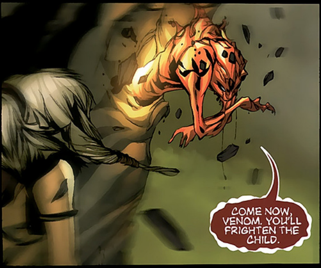

THAT'S QUITE THE SWORD YOU HAVE THERE.
FORGED BY MAGIC, WAS IT?
AY, GOOD SIR.
OR SO SAYS THE DWARF I WON IT FROM.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, SIR? A GAME OF DICE? I'LL WAGER MY SWORD FOR YOUR HORSE.
I WOULDN'T TRUST MY LUCK AGAINST YOU, BLACKSMITH.

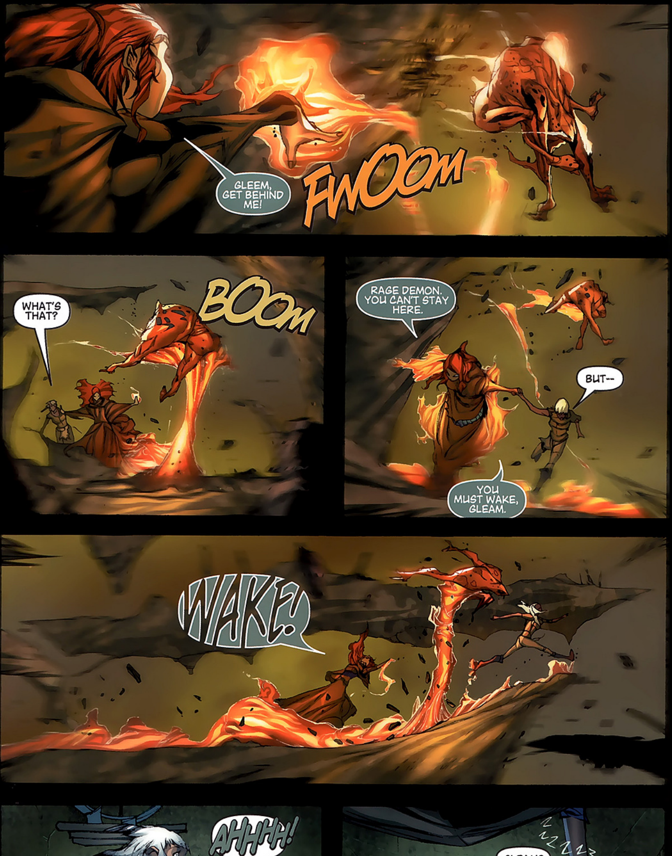

WHERE... WHERE AM I?
YOU ARE IN THE FADE, THE DREAM REALM, THE WORLD BETWEEN YOURS AND THE AFTERLIFE.
WHO ARE YOU?
IN THIS WORLD I AM VENOM, FOR MY STING IS QUICK AND DEADLY. BUT IN LIFE, I WAS VENESS.
YOUR MOTHER.

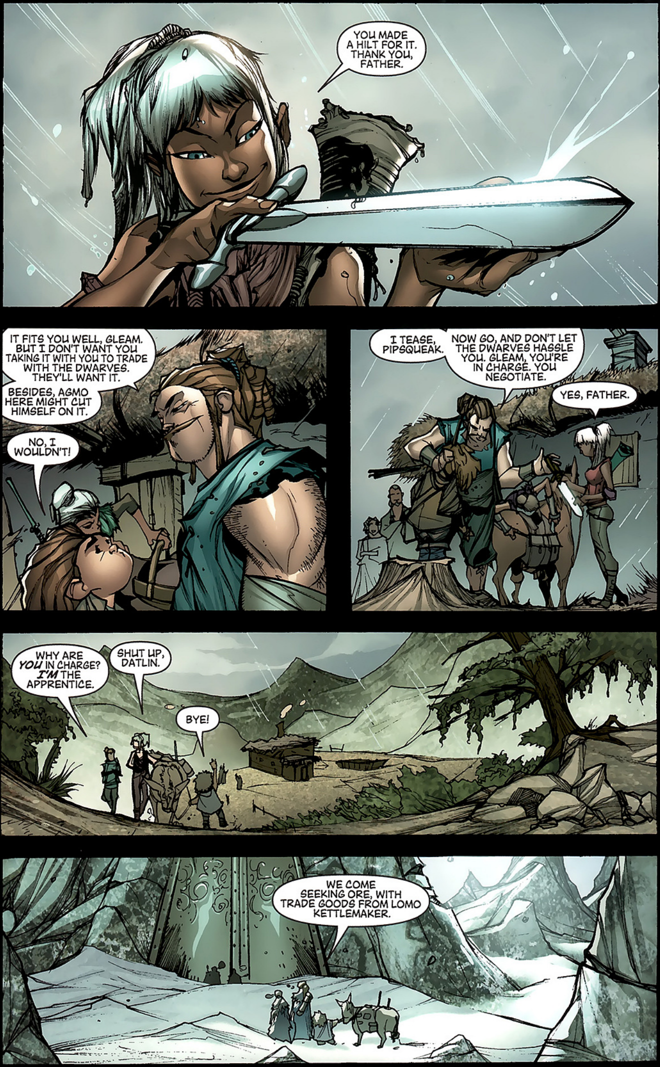

MY MOTHER?
YES, GLEAM. WITH POWERS LIKE YOUR OWN.
I HAVE KEPT MYSELF IN THIS REALM SO THAT I MAY WATCH OVER YOU.

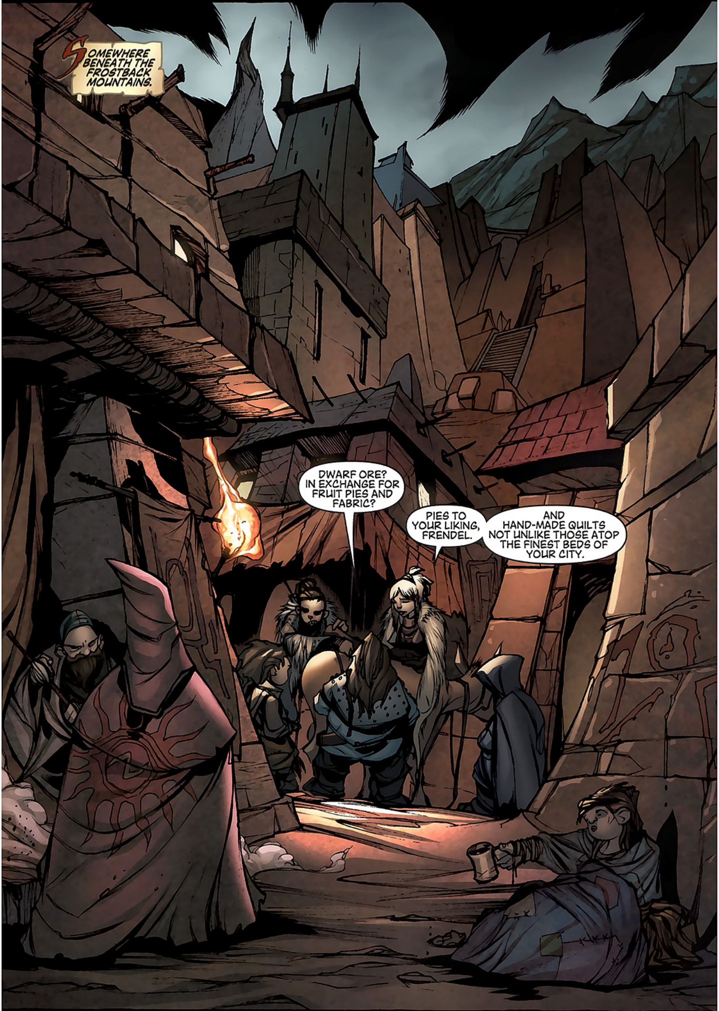

I SHOW MYSELF NOW AS A WARNING.
YOU MUST BE CAUTIOUS, CHILD. THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD SEEK TO CONTROL YOU, TO MANIPULATE YOUR POWERS.
TEMPLARS.

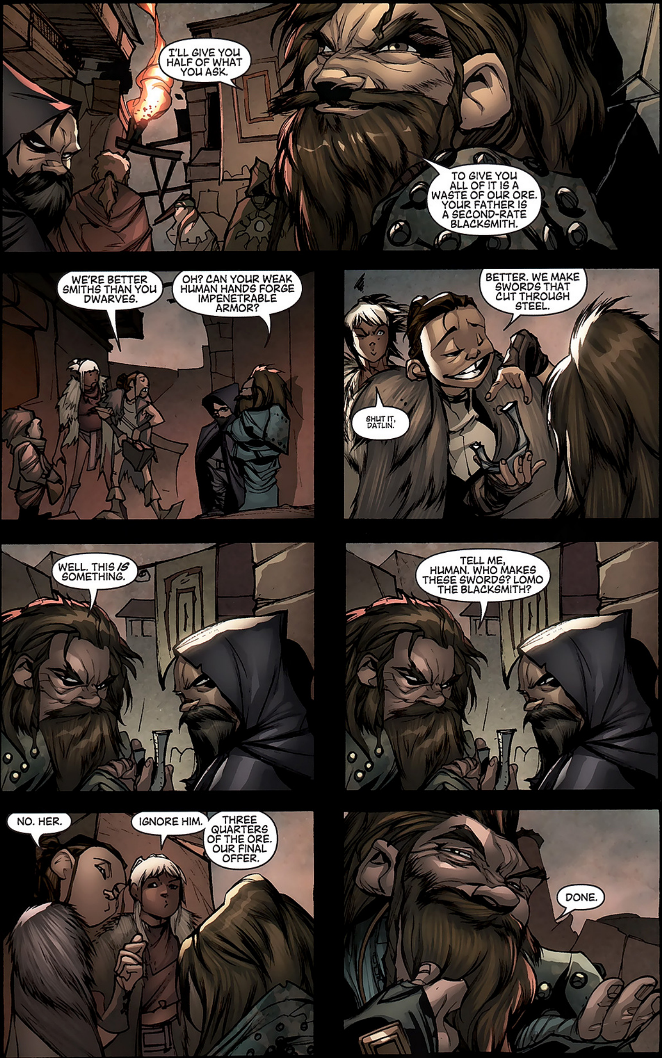

CRACK
YES. AND WORSE THINGS.

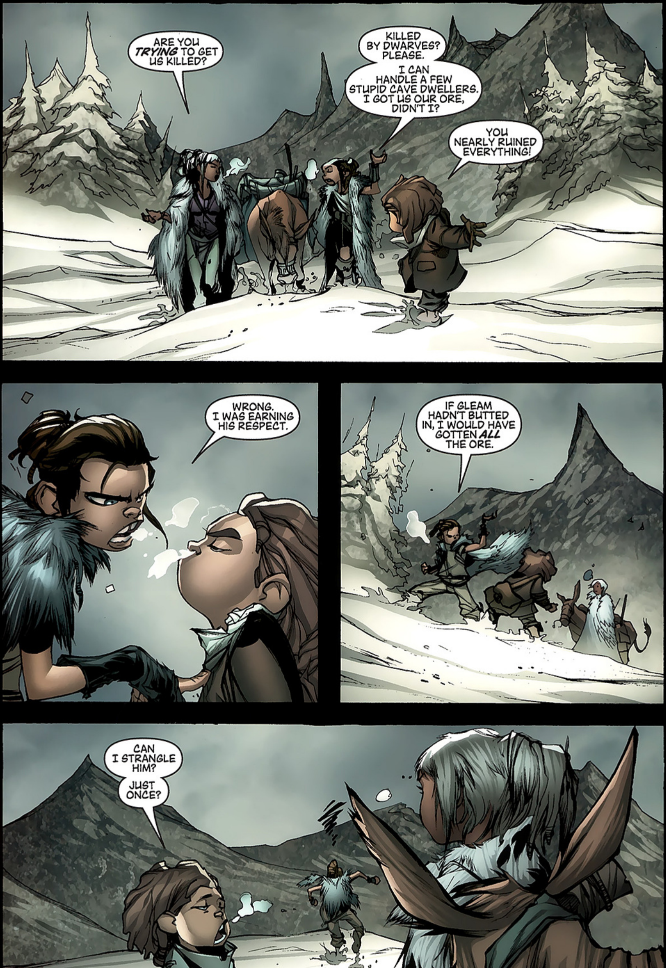

COME NOW, VENOM. YOU'LL FRIGHTEN THE CHILD.

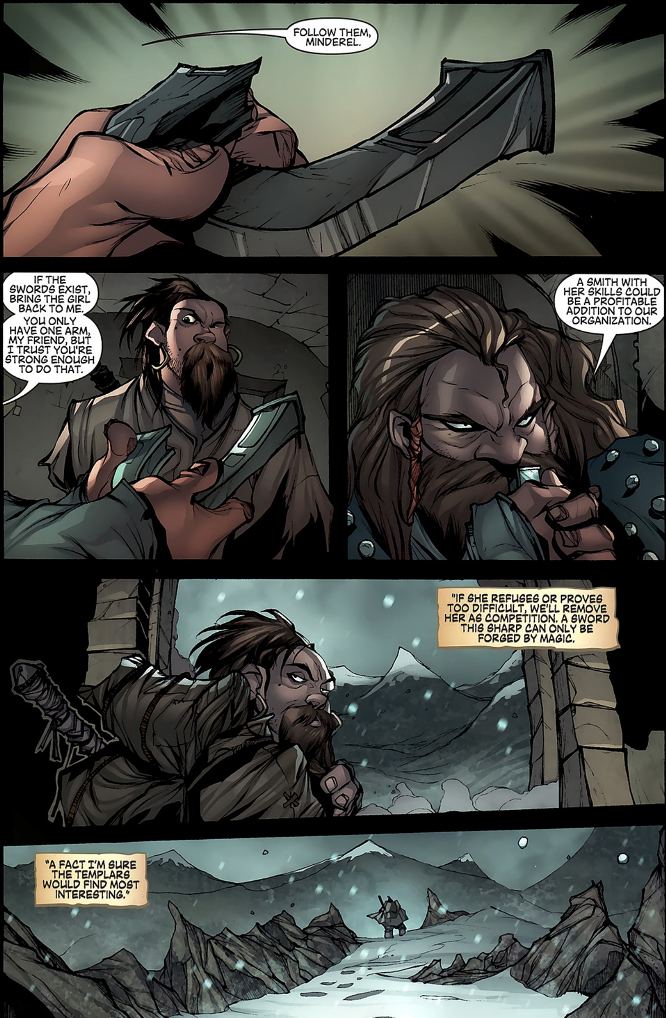

GLEEM, GET BEHIND ME!
FWOOM
WHAT'S THAT?
BOOM
RAGE DEMON. YOU CAN'T STAY HERE.
BUT--
YOU MUST WAKE, GLEAM.
WAKE!
AHHHH!
ZZZZZZZ
GLEAM?
I'M FINE.
ZZZZZZZ
BAD DREAM.

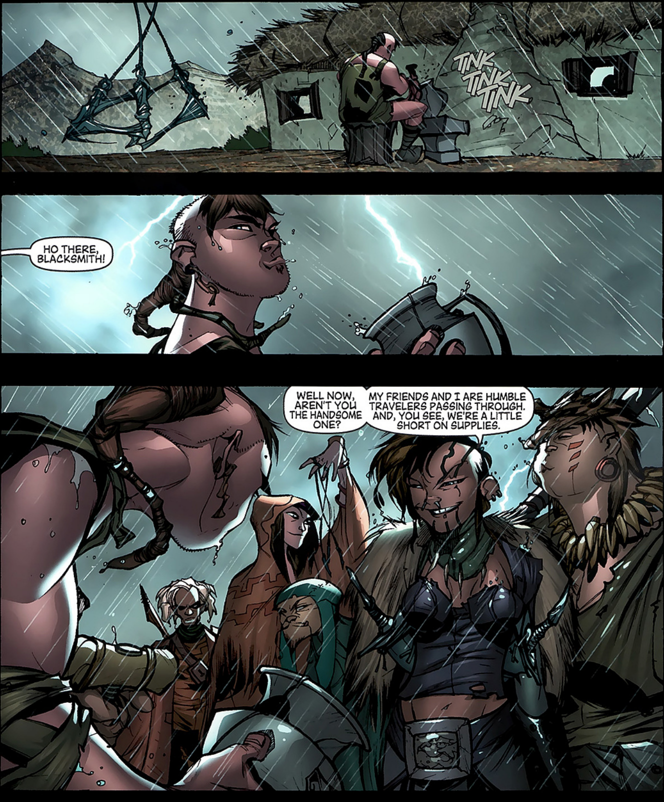

YOU MADE A HILT FOR IT. THANK YOU, FATHER.
IT FITS YOU WELL, GLEAM. BUT I DON'T WANT YOU TAKING IT WITH YOU TO TRADE WITH THE DWARVES. THEY'LL WANT IT.
BESIDES, AGMO HERE MIGHT CUT HIMSELF ON IT.
NO, I WOULDN'T!
I TEASE, PIPSQUEAK.
NOW GO, AND DON'T LET THE DWARVES HASSLE YOU. GLEAM, YOU'RE IN CHARGE. YOU NEGOTIATE.
YES, FATHER.
WHY ARE *YOU* IN CHARGE? *I'M* THE APPRENTICE.
SHUT UP, DATLIN.
BYE!
WE COME SEEKING ORE, WITH TRADE GOODS FROM LOMO KETTLEMAKER.

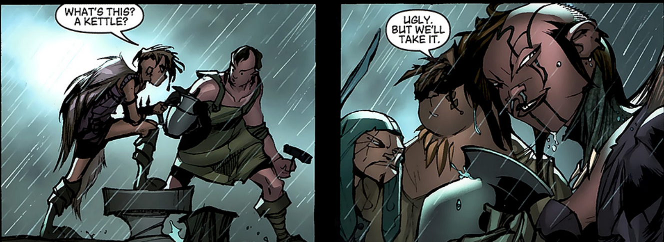

SOMEWHERE BENEATH THE FROSTBACK MOUNTAINS.
DWARF ORE? IN EXCHANGE FOR FRUIT PIES AND FABRIC?
PIES TO YOUR LIKING, FRENDEL.
AND HAND-MADE QUILTS NOT UNLIKE THOSE ATOP THE FINEST BEDS OF YOUR CITY.

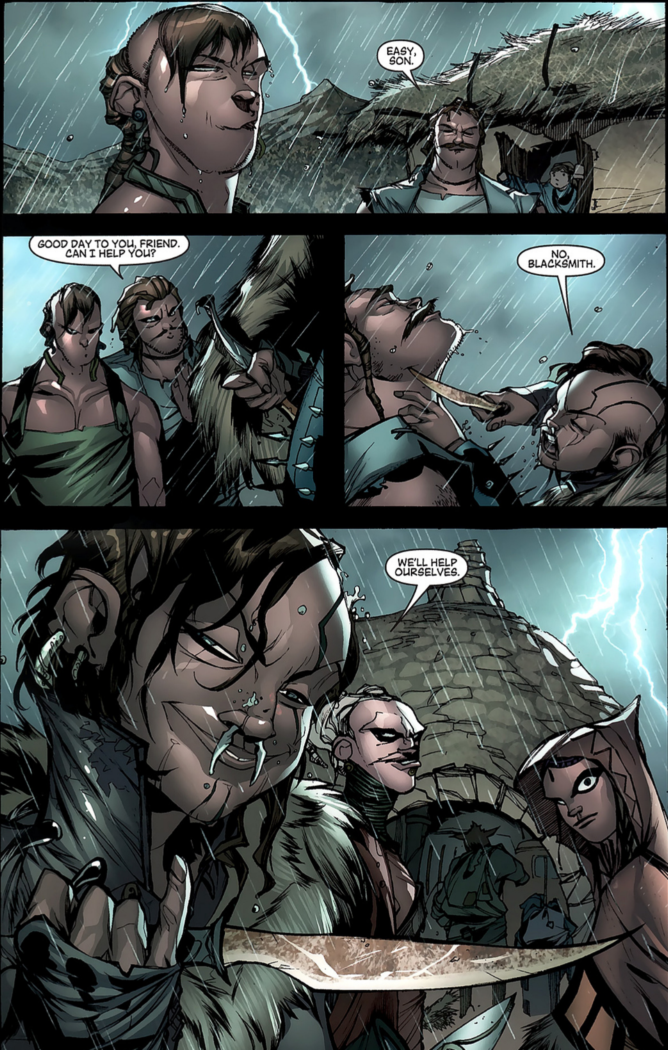

I'LL GIVE YOU HALF OF WHAT YOU ASK.
TO GIVE YOU ALL OF IT IS A WASTE OF OUR ORE. YOUR FATHER IS A SECOND-RATE BLACKSMITH.
WE'RE BETTER SMITHS THAN YOU DWARVES.
OH? CAN YOUR WEAK HUMAN HANDS FORGE IMPENETRABLE ARMOR?
BETTER. WE MAKE SWORDS THAT CUT THROUGH STEEL.
SHUT IT, DATLIN.
WELL. THIS *IS* SOMETHING.
TELL ME, HUMAN. WHO MAKES THESE SWORDS? LOMO THE BLACKSMITH?
NO. HER.
IGNORE HIM.
THREE QUARTERS OF THE ORE. OUR FINAL OFFER.
DONE.

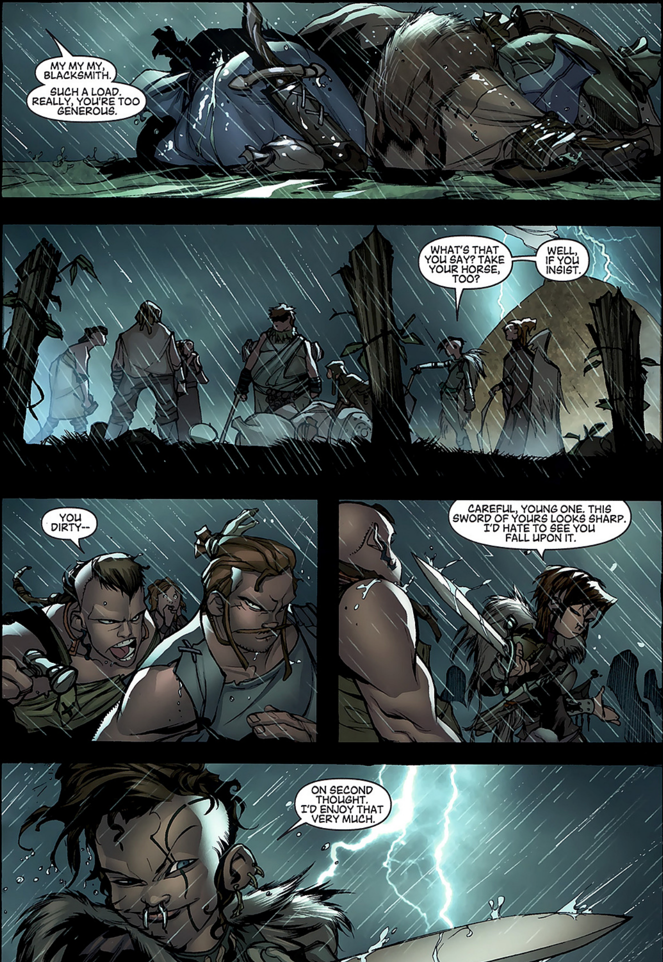

ARE YOU *TRYING* TO GET US KILLED?
KILLED BY DWARVES? PLEASE.
I CAN HANDLE A FEW STUPID CAVE DWELLERS. I GOT US OUR ORE, DIDN'T I?
YOU NEARLY RUINED EVERYTHING!
WRONG. I WAS EARNING HIS RESPECT.
IF GLEAM HADN'T BUTTED IN, I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN *ALL* THE ORE.
CAN I STRANGLE HIM? JUST ONCE?

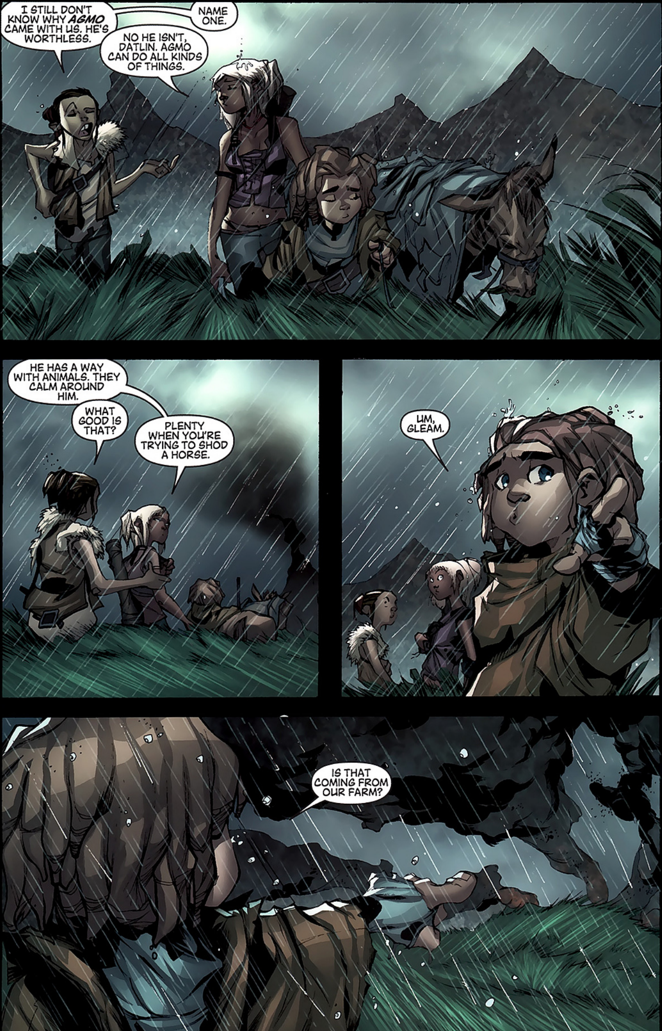

FOLLOW THEM, MINDEREL.
IF THE SWORDS EXIST, BRING THE GIRL BACK TO ME.
YOU ONLY HAVE ONE ARM, MY FRIEND, BUT I TRUST YOU'RE STRONG ENOUGH TO DO THAT.
A SMITH WITH HER SKILLS COULD BE A PROFITABLE ADDITION TO OUR ORGANIZATION.
"IF SHE REFUSES OR PROVES TOO DIFFICULT, WE'LL REMOVE HER AS COMPETITION. A SWORD THIS SHARP CAN ONLY BE FORGED BY MAGIC.
"A FACT I'M SURE THE TEMPLARS WOULD FIND MOST INTERESTING."

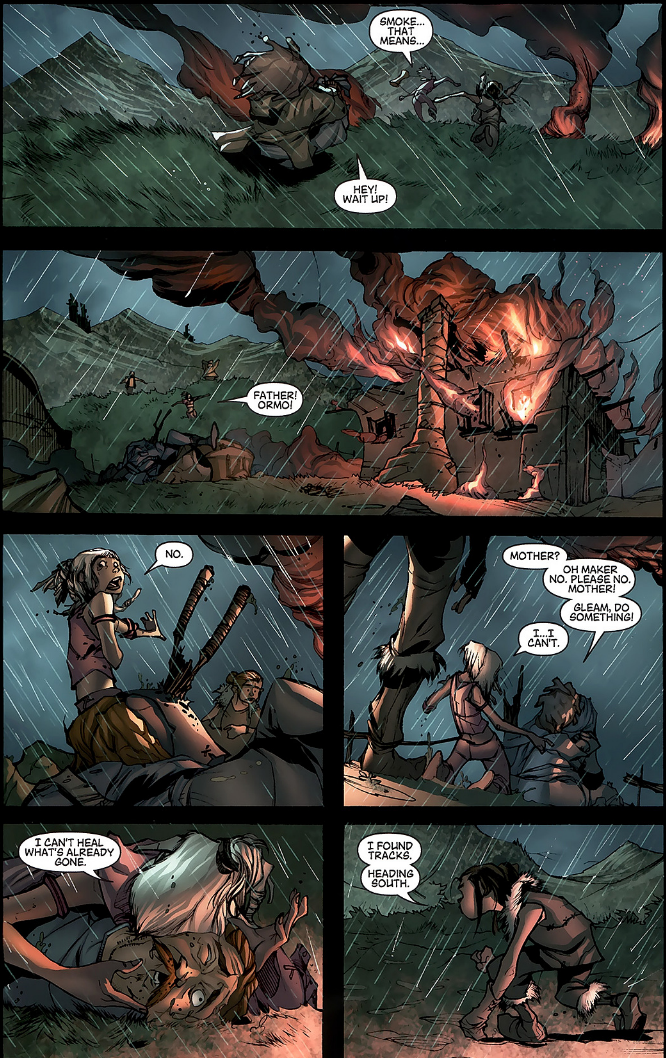

TINK TINK TINK
HO THERE, BLACKSMITH!
WELL NOW, AREN'T YOU THE HANDSOME ONE?
MY FRIENDS AND I ARE HUMBLE TRAVELERS PASSING THROUGH. AND, YOU SEE, WE'RE A LITTLE SHORT ON SUPPLIES.

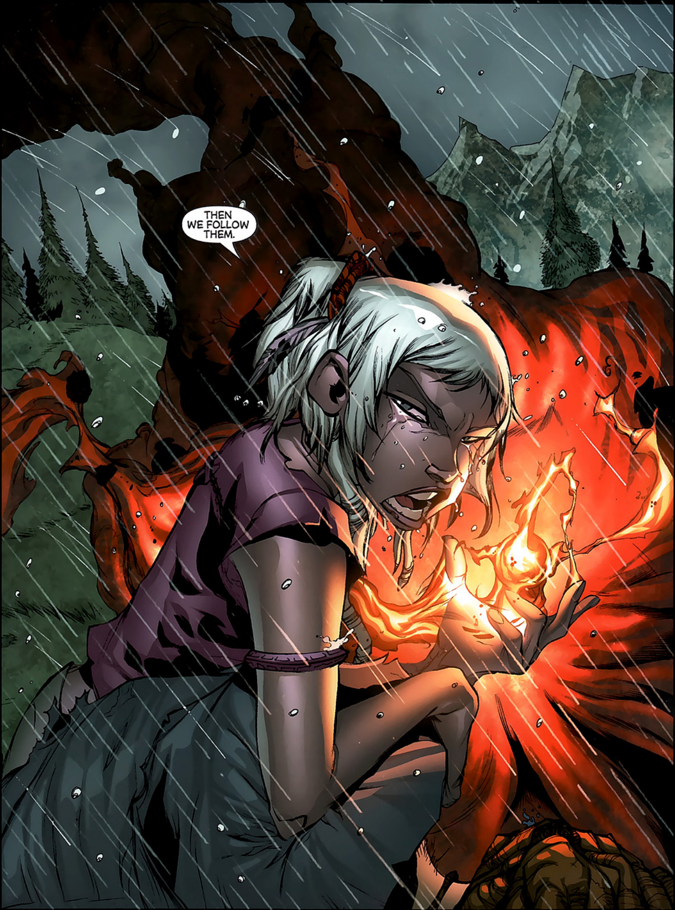

WHAT'S THIS? A KETTLE?
UGLY. BUT WE'LL TAKE IT.


EASY, SON.
GOOD DAY TO YOU, FRIEND. CAN I HELP YOU?
NO, BLACKSMITH.
WE'LL HELP OURSELVES.


MY MY MY, BLACKSMITH.
SUCH A LOAD. REALLY, YOU'RE TOO GENEROUS.
WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY? TAKE YOUR HORSE, TOO?
WELL, IF YOU INSIST.
YOU DIRTY--
CAREFUL, YOUNG ONE. THIS SWORD OF YOURS LOOKS SHARP. I'D HATE TO SEE YOU FALL UPON IT.
ON SECOND THOUGHT. I'D ENJOY THAT VERY MUCH.


I STILL DON'T KNOW WHY *AGMO* CAME WITH US. HE'S WORTHLESS.
NAME ONE.
NO HE ISN'T, DATLIN. AGMO CAN DO ALL KINDS OF THINGS.
HE HAS A WAY WITH ANIMALS. THEY CALM AROUND HIM.
WHAT GOOD IS THAT?
PLENTY WHEN YOU'RE TRYING TO SHOD A HORSE.
UM, GLEAM.
IS THAT COMING FROM OUR FARM?


SMOKE... THAT MEANS...
HEY! WAIT UP!
FATHER! ORMO!
NO.
MOTHER?
OH MAKER NO. PLEASE NO. MOTHER!
GLEAM, DO SOMETHING!
I...I CAN'T.
I CAN'T HEAL WHAT'S ALREADY GONE.
I FOUND TRACKS.
HEADING SOUTH.


THEN WE FOLLOW THEM.

To Be Continued

SORCERY AND STEEL
in the next issue of:
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